DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 081 841 TM 003 202

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TITLE Development of Criterion Dimensions for Youth-Work Training Programs.
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Disadvantaged Youth; *Evaluation Criteria; Program Effectiveness; *Social Adjustment; Student Evaluation; *Success Factors; Technical Reports; *Vocational Adjustment; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

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ED 081841

TM 003 202

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Development of Criterion Dimensions for Youth-Work Training Programs

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Abstract

Two sets of multiple criterion dimensions were identified for use with disadvantaged adolescents who participated in youth-work training programs. One set was composed of five factors applicable to short-term "success" at program completion (e.g., "Training Program Adjustment"; "Social-Community Adjustment"). Six factors extracted from a matrix of post-program variables defined a criterion domain covering various aspects of employment and social adjustment (e.g., "General Adjustment and Job Success"; "Blue-Collar Job Success"; "Community-Family Adjustment"). Limitations in understanding behavioral outcomes were shown, where there is dependence on a single over-riding criterion measure such as Employment.

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The process of criterion development has long been viewed as essential to the design and conduct of any social or educational program. Accompanying that view has been reasonable agreement among investigators regarding analytical approaches to the identification of multiple behavioral dimensions and their importance in offering better understanding of trainee performance and program effects (Dunnette, 1963; Guion, 1967). Yet, many national social programs initiated during the past decade--such as those dealing with manpower training--have neglected to develop viable criterion systems, without which integrated research and evaluation efforts would seem to have been seriously impaired (Borus & Tash, 1970).

The present study represents an initial attempt to identify and examine sets of empirically derived, independent criterion dimensions for a major class of manpower training programs designated as "youth-work training programs" (Herman & Sadofsky, 1966). Such programs have served adolescents from poverty level backgrounds, a large proportion of whom are also school dropouts and minority group members who have proven uniquely difficult to locate for data gathering purposes (U. S. Department of Labor, 1969).

Inherent in the above intent is an opportunity to describe salient performance characteristics of disadvantaged adolescents, trained in these or similar programs, from which more useful and meaningful definitions of training program "success" may be formulated.

METHOD

Criterion Questionnaires: Two criterion questionnaires were constructed. One dealt with relatively short-term (proximal) criterion variables applicable to trainee performance at the completion of the training program. (Program Completion Questionnaire). The other dealt with longer term (distal) outcomes applicable to the ex-trainee some six months or more after completion of the program (Post-Program Questionnaire). Based on goals stated in enabling legislation and interviews with program professionals regarding their training objectives, it is possible to define five a priori (rational) categories that encompass broad areas of trainee success at program completion, within which a total of 32 criterion measures could be specified. These consist of: Vocational Planning Ability (measures of level, appropriateness and quality of anticipated jobs and search methods); Personal-Social Adjustment (suitability of relations with family, other community members, police); Work Motivation (measures of willingness to accept employment in the face of adverse job features, willingness to take job training); Work-Training Program Adjustment (guidance counselor, work supervisor and peer ratings, work site absences); and Feelings of Vocational Adequacy (trainee perception of his potential capabilities as an employee).

For the post-program criteria a total of 36 variables was specified on the basis of the following rationally defined categories: Extent and Level of Employment (hours worked per week, length of stay on job, quality of job); Job Performance and Stability (number of jobs held, number and size of salary increases, promotions, employer proficiency rating); Work Satisfaction (score on a job satisfaction scale); Personal-Social Adjustment (suitability of relations with family, police, other community members, health problems,

savings, use of credit); and Work-Seeking Motivation and Planning (time required to find first job, number of sources used, number of job interviews and applications filed, suitability of short- and long-term plans).

Sample and Data Collection: The Program Completion Questionnaire was administered to a sample of 137 high school dropouts (55 males, 82 females) at the time they had completed their training in six Neighborhood Youth Corps, Out-of-School programs located in six cities in various parts of the country. The Post-Program Questionnaire was utilized with a sample of 154 former trainees (60 males, 94 females), from the same training programs in the same six cities, who had been out of the program for periods ranging from six months to 1 1/2 years. All members of the latter sample had obtained full-time employment for at least one week or more after leaving the program.

Mean respondent age was 16.7 years for the program completion sample and 18.1 years for the post-program sample. Ethnic composition of the samples was approximately 80% Black, 6% Spanish-speaking (Puerto Rican or Mexican-American) and 14% White.

The questionnaires were orally administered to these cross-sectional samples on an individual basis by six interviewers, each of whom were Black and residing in the city in which they collected the data. Respondents were paid for their participation.

RESULTS

Each of the two sets of variables from each of the two criterion questionnaires (32 Program Completion and 36 Post-Program variables) were intercorrelated and factor analyzed using a principal components solution with varimax rotation to orthogonality.

Program Completion Criterion Dimensions - as derived from the 32 variables, consisted of five interpretable factors fairly similar to the hypothesized, a priori, categories. The dominant factor was clearly identifiable as a Training Program Adjustment factor in which the pattern of loadings depicted the trainee who received higher proficiency ratings from counselors and work supervisors, had fewer work-site absences, was willing to accept training in a greater variety of jobs and tended not to have problems with the police (self report and actual police records). A second factor defined a cluster of behaviors that is primarily external to performance in the training program and was designated as Social-Community Adjustment with outcomes of better family relations, fewer problems with people in the community, less trouble with police, and a higher peer rating score.

Two other factors were based largely on trainee personal perceptions. One was designated as Job Aspiration Level with the positive end of the factor defining greater expectations for starting and highest salaries, a better quality first job desired, more suitable long range plans, higher self appraisal of ability to accomplish plans and higher scores on feelings of vocational adequacy and a Work Motivation Scale. The other factor was identified as Job Planning Competency since it combined more positive feelings of ability to do a sought-after job, with greater knowledge of the job sought and more and better ways to undertake a job search.

The last of the program completion factors was one of Interpersonal Adjustment with lead loadings indicating more frequent selection for rating by peers and higher peer rating scores. In addition there are positive loadings on feelings of vocational adequacy, concern with job characteristics and health status.

Post-Program Criterion Dimensions - from the 36 x 36 matrix of post-program measures, differed markedly from the hypothesized dimensions. The dominant factor of the six extracted was defined as General Adjustment and Job Success with the key variables in the loading pattern depicting the successful ex-trainee as one who was employed (on the day of the interview), received a higher employer rating, had stayed on his job longer, more nearly met his job expectations, got along better with his family, saved money, and had fewer problems with police. Interestingly, this factor tended to depict outcomes applicable to ex-trainees who took white collar jobs. However, a separate factor of Blue Collar Job Success also emerged, with those who entered blue collar employment as the ones who found their first job more quickly, worked more hours per week, received a higher starting salary, obtained a higher level job and expressed greater job satisfaction.

A third job-related factor was defined as Job Stability-Mobility with more mobile former trainees (in jobs and residences) tending to be rated lower in proficiency by the employer.

Of the three remaining factors, one clearly defined Community and Family Adjustment with the ex-trainee having fewer problems with the police, providing more financial assistance to the family, having better personal relations with his family and with other members of the community, and being more readily able to obtain credit. The designation of a fifth factor as Striving for Vocational Success could be inferred from favorable outcomes in a number of on-the-job criteria (higher raises, more promotions, higher employer ratings) and in the ex-trainee's desire for higher levels of employment. The remaining factor designated as Vocational Adjustment-Dissatisfaction encompassed outcomes that describe aspects of vocational adjustment (higher employer rating, good short term job planning, more raises) but tended, despite the successes, to be

accompanied by ex-trainee feelings of job dissatisfaction (i.e., he tended not to have met his job expectations and to score lower on the Job Satisfaction Scale).

In the above post-program analysis, the importance of incorporating job-related criterion variables necessitated use of a sample with employment experience. But a question can be posed of the value of the dichotomous employment criterion per se (i.e., Obtained Post-Program Employment vs. Never Employed) in terms of its pattern of relationships to other criterion outcomes. A sample of 88 former trainees who had never obtained employment were permitted to respond to those portions of the questionnaire pertinent to their post-program experiences. These variables were, of course, limited solely to the planning-motivational-adjustment types of outcomes. Correlations were computed between the dichotomous employment measure and 14 such applicable questionnaire variables with the variable of "length-of-time-out-of-the-program" partialled out. No meaningful pattern of relationships between the 14 variables and the dichotomous employment outcome was found. The only correlation of note was a partial r of .40 ($p < .01$) between Employment and Quality of Job Sought (i.e., those former trainees who obtained full-time employment tended to seek higher quality jobs than those who had never obtained post-program employment).

CONCLUSIONS

Coherent and sensibly interpretable criterion dimensions could be derived empirically for use with youth-work training program enrollees at completion of the training program and over longer post-program periods. The structure of the criterion domain identified points up the multiple nature of outcomes needed to define complex behavioral aspects of trainee "success." By contrast, a single, overriding criterion (i.e., Employment vs. No Employment), whatever its face value, is highly limiting in any contribution to such understanding.

The proximal and distal dimensions extracted in this cross-sectional study provide a flexible core of criterion variables (or factored scales) that might enhance much needed continuity of research efforts with disadvantaged, minority youngsters enrolled in manpower training programs.

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